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DE RUEHCV #2141/01 1991821  
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5544  
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6786  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 5635  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0514  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 1336  
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2192  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0438  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY 1436  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0560  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 3156  
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1353  
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3899  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0475  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2275  
RUEHSN/AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR PRIORITY 0931  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO PRIORITY 3639  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 1057  
RUEHAO/AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY 0898  
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 0550  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0377  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0866

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CARACAS 002141

SIPDIS

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HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
DEPT PASS TO AID/OTI RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/14/2016  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)  
SUBJECT: SUMATE FOCUSING AHEAD DESPITE NEW BRV PRESSURE

REF: A. 05 CARACAS 03682

- [1](#)B. CARACAS 00461
- [1](#)C. CARACAS 00339
- [1](#)D. CARACAS 01997

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR REAS  
ON 1.4 (D)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) On July 13, PolCouns met with Sumate President Alejandro Plaz to discuss the government's latest moves against the electoral NGO and their progress in organizing the primary. Although the trial against Sumate's leaders has been suspended since February 2006 (refs a-c), on July 12 the National Assembly asked the Attorney General to start a new investigation against the organization for allegedly accepting foreign funding to organize the primary to choose a single opposition candidate. The charges, which include treason, conspiracy against the electoral board, and inciting criminal activity, are largely based on government opinion disguised as facts. In response, Sumate has released its budget and funding sources for the primary, and is prepared to release all financial information, if necessary. They also subsequently repaid the USD 300,000 DRL grant to assist in an audit of the electoral registry. Although Sumate may have the funds and volunteers it needs to hold the primary, the NGO still needs to address serious concerns about voter privacy and work around obstructionist political parties, such as Accion Democratica, to make the vote a success. End Summary.

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## First Trial Still Stalled

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12. (C) PolCouns met with Sumate President Alejandro Plaz July 13 to discuss the BRV,s latest moves against the NGO and progress on the primary. Plaz noted that there had been little movement on the conspiracy case against him, Maria Corina Machado, and Ricardo Estevez since the trial was suspended in February (reftels). He said the judge is organizing the selection of the lay judges (escabinos) and the trial may start again after the judiciary's vacations in August. Once begun, Plaz expected things to move very quickly, perhaps resulting in convictions within 2 months. Plaz thought there was a slight chance that, if convicted, Chavez might grant a pardon to avoid international condemnation.

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. . .While New One May Be Starting

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13. (C) On July 12 National Assembly (AN) Deputies Ismael Garcia (Aragua) and Jose Alborno (Guarico)--the heads of ruling coalition partners Podemos and Patria Para Todos, respectively--sent a petition to the Attorney General asking his office to immediately detain and investigate Sumate leaders for treason, conspiring against the National Electoral Council, and inciting criminal activity for allegedly accepting foreign money to organize the primary to choose a unified opposition candidate. Plaz expects they will be called to testify before the National Assembly soon, and he warned that arrests could occur at anytime.

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14. (C) To take some of the wind out of the BRV,s sails, Plaz publicly released information on the costs and financing for the primaries during a press conference on July 14. Plaz said the NGO had collected forty percent of the 1.3 billion Bolivars (roughly USD 600,000) needed for the event. He vehemently denied any foreign funding sources and said most costs would be shouldered by the 50,000 volunteers who are donating their time. Plaz expected the investigation would expand to include all Sumate operations so the NGO is prepared to release information about all of the NGO's funding sources when they are called before the legislature, if requested. Given the deterioration in the NGO's relationship with the BRV over the past couple of years, Plaz said Sumate had stopped keeping lists of donors a while ago. Instead, when soliciting donations, they give out Sumate's account information and tell potential donors they are free to contribute as they wished and anonymously. That way if called to testify Sumate can truthfully say they do not know the identity of many of their benefactors.

15. (C) Plaz gave PolCouns a copy of the AN petition to the Attorney General. The deputies cite numerous alleged violations of the Constitution and Penal Code based on public information. Much of the "evidence" is in fact of the BRV,s own invention, such as Sumate's "notorious public receipt of USD 12.5 million from the United States to organize the primary." Disturbingly, the petition is written such that anyone connected with the primary--including the opposition pre-candidates-- could be detained or investigated, and Sumate's office and equipment confiscated.

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Grant Repayment

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16. (C) As Plaz noted in his meetings in Washington in mid-June, Sumate had decided to return, without using, the USD 300,000 DRL grant intended to help finance a much needed audit of Venezuela's national electoral registry (REP). Sumate will continue to work with others to audit the politically manipulated REP, but said the political climate

had deteriorated so much that they had decided to return the money. Repayment was made by Sumate on July 14, 2006. Plaz said they would likely make a public statement at some point in response to the National Assembly's investigation indicating they had returned the money, although noting that there was nothing legal or ethically wrong with their accepting this sort of support.

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Primary  
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17. (C) Plaz was reflective, yet upbeat about the August 13 primaries and the controversy they engendered late last month (ref d). Plaz told PolCouns the money collected to date would cover the technical preparations, such as printing ballots, renting tables, etc. The NGO and candidates will consider a turnout of one million voters a success, although pollsters have predicted a turnout of anywhere from 1 to 4 million, he said. Julio Borges told Plaz he directed his Primero Justicia party to get one million supporters out to the polls, as has Sumate. Manuel Rosales, not wanting to be shown up by his electoral rival, committed to the same goal. Sumate leaders are currently discussing how to finance their

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get-out-the-vote campaign and how best to balance concerns about voter privacy and turnout in the campaign.

18. (C) Sumate leaders met with Borges and Rosales July 12 to mend fences, and were scheduled to meet with Teodoro Petkoff's campaign manager soon. Plaz said all understand that Sumate's "ultimatum" and the candidates' response hurt all of their public images. They also smoothed over differences about how to respond to the CNE's decisions on granting electoral conditions. Plaz seemed concerned about Sumate's image following the rift and admitted the NGO had taken a gamble. Still, he said the number of people volunteering to work in the primary had soared once the initiative was resurrected and the NGO has had to turn people away.

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Comment  
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19. (C) Some interpret the BRV's latest moves as a sign that the government is worried that the primary could lead to the successful selection of a strong opposition challenger and undermine its claims about the ills of manual voting (a debate revived by the manually-conducted Mexican and Colombian elections). The BRV likely has several goals in mind, however, including keeping the opposition off-balance, intimidating voters so Chavez can ridicule the winner as a representative of the elite minority, and implicating the "empire" in yet another "evil" plot to undermine the Venezuelan government through its opposition "puppets." Sumate's response, particularly its emphasis on volunteer support, was a clever attempt to recast the event as an expression of popular will. Their continued transparency in disclosure of information should also serve them. Still, the NGO will have to adequately address potential voters' privacy concerns (i.e. that the government will know who voted in the primary and punish them) and work around obstructionist opposition parties like pro-abstention Accion Democratica if they hope to meet even half of the expectations generated for the primary.

BROWNFIELD